
REPORT OF THE ANNUAL EXCURSION, SLIGO, 1st, 2nd and 3rd JUNE, 1948

By T. McEVOY*

The choice of Sligo district for the fifth Annual Excursion was justified by a record attendance, the party exceeding forty with several new faces in evidence. We were fortunate in that the notorious Sligo weather merely threatened by day and reserved its downpours for the hours of darkness. Thanks to this circumstance, the hospitality of the private woodland owners and the excellent organisation of the local State forestry staff, we are able to report a highly successful outing which was enjoyed by all present.

* The Editor regrets that a more complete account of the Annual Excursion is not available.

Tuesday, 1st June.

The first day was devoted to a tour of Sligo State forest which brought us on a circuit of beautiful Lough Gill. The party assembled at Corkran's Mall, Sligo, and drove by car to Hazelwood. At the entrance to the Forest the President, Mr. O'Beirne, welcomed the members and thanked the Minister for Lands for the privilege of viewing the State Forest. Mr. Ager, Divisional Inspector, welcomed the Society on behalf of the Minister and mentioned that the Director very much regretted he could not be present. He introduced the local staff, Mr. McCormack, District Officer; Mr. Maloney, his assistant, and Mr. Kerrigan, Forrester.

The Convener, Mr. McEvoy, then outlined the history of Hazelwood. Up to the 10th century it had been the stronghold of the famous Sligo clan, the O'Connors whose descendant, Madame O'Connor Don, still lived on the shore of Lough Gill at Holywell. It passed through many hands in the unsettled period following until it fell to the Welsh family of Wynne early in the 18th century. They held it up to 1939 when the estate passed to the Land Commission, the agricultural land being divided into small farms and the woodland falling to the Forestry Division. Most of the woodlands were the result of Owen Wynne's enthusiasm for planting between the years 1785 and 1843. The manuscript records of his plantings in his own hand were now in the possession of our Vice-President, Mr. McMahon. Since the forest was opened some 700 acres of new plantation had been laid down.

Hazelwood itself is lowland limestone ground with soils varying from deep fertile drift to mild alkaline peat. Discussion centred on what species were most suitable for these types, on the management of hardwood-conifer mixtures as exemplified by the young crops, and on the advisability of retaining scattered matured trees for shelter for the new crop. It was generally agreed that, on the rare occasions when fertile limestone drift soils at low elevations came into the foresters' hands, they should be used for the most exacting hardwoods. Yet when hardwood groups of ash and oak were planted in a matrix of conifers (N.S. etc.) it was difficult to advise the ruthless sacrifice of a very promising conifer for the benefit of a hardwood which was not yet thrusting upwards with the desired vigour. The evidence of recent severe frost damage on species such as oak, silver fir, and spruce turned the discussion to ways and means of combatting spring frosts and to the question of shelter in general. On this subject Mr. Clear was able to point to an example of the unwitting creation of a frost-

hollow by the blocking of a hollow by the rapid growth of an alder crop. Much doubt was cast on the effectiveness of scattered mature trees as frost shelter while the difficulty of removing such trees after the crop was established was stressed.

We were fortunate to witness a sight in Hazelwood which must be rare, if not unique, in these islands. Over an area of some ten acres on the site of a mixed wood we saw general regeneration of Douglas fir from occasional mature trees and also groups of natural *Macrocarpa* and European Silver fir. These varied in height from 4 to 12 feet and it was considered that they were sufficiently close to form a pure final crop.

At Holywell, which we visited by kind permission of Madame O'Connor, we inspected *Arbutus* in its most northerly natural habitat in Europe on the limestone cliffs, and we also had a fine panoramic view of Lough Gill, with historic Church Island in the foreground and Yeats' Lake Isle of Inishfree to the west.

Continuing the circuit of the lake, we lunched excellently at Dromahaire and spent the afternoon between Slish Wood and Doonee. Slish is one of the remnants of the natural sessile oak forest on the acid metamorphic rocks of this district. It is notable for the presence of aspen and whitebeam along the lake shore. At about 500 feet elevation the oakwood gives way to climax peat over bare glaciated gneiss. Much of the area has been cleared and replanted since acquisition.

Wednesday, 2nd June

The second day was given over to private forestry and members were very appreciative of the opportunity to visit Lady Gore-Booth's woods at Lisadell and Lady Mountbatten's plantations at Mullaghmore.

At Lisadell we were received by Lady Gore-Booth and were conducted around this fine estate by her two daughters. Members were very interested in the walled gardens with their profusion of flowers and tender plants within a few yards of the Atlantic, and in the house with its historic associations.

The numerous extensive plantations running into thousands of acres were at once a revelation and an object lesson. The entire estate is within a mile of the open Atlantic and the exposure is, of course, very severe. On the other hand the soils derived from a calcareous sandstone are good forest subjects. In the plantations over 30 years, the usual mixture of the older conifers occur—Scots pine, larch, silver, Norway spruce, etc., but with an occasional

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Union Wood, Ballisodare, June 3rd, 1948.
Excursion Convener addresses members on geology and soils.



Excursion Group at Lisadell, June 2nd, 1948.

Sitka. These latter proved so outstanding that practically all the younger plantations are pure Sitka and of uniformly good growth suffering remarkably little from the sea wind. There was one small plot of *Abies grandis*, but it was remarkably good. Japanese larch was also doing well. This estate provides valuable evidence of the suitability of the western American conifers in our western counties where mild winters, constant wind and high rainfall are the significant climatic factors.

On our departure from Lisadell Mr. O'Beirne expressed our hearty thanks for the warm welcome and the facilities accorded us.

The afternoon was spent at Mullaghmore, a windswept narrow peninsula with rolling sand dunes which threatened to engulf the green fields early in the 19th century. This danger was met by Lord Palmerston, the then landlord, who fixed the dunes by planting marram grass. It was he also who built the quay but his efforts to make Mullaghmore a fashionable seaside resort failed.

Inspired by the work in the Landes, he established the dune plantations which range in age from 70 to 100 years. Maritime pine is the principal species but Austrian and Corsican pine and sycamore were also used in the inner plantations. The use of sea-buckthorn and *Robinia* are evidence of the care and skill used, the former providing an excellent fringe and the latter providing nitrogen by its root-nodules—a plant food which is often lacking in sand. Further details of these plantations will be found in Mr. O'Beirne's note on "Afforestation of Sand Dunes."

This was, I think, the only example of successful sand dune afforestation with Maritime pine on our west coast and members noted with regret the rapid destruction due mainly to the increase in the rabbit population. By their close grazing and burrowing they are undoing the work of a century to such an extent that the plantations may soon disappear entirely and moving sand may again become a menace.

The President thanked Mr. J. W. Bracken, the agent, for showing us around and asked him to convey our thanks to Lady Mountbatten.

At Cliffoney, on the way back to Sligo, Capt. Hamilton acted as guide when we inspected a prehistoric stone structure believed to date from 2000 B.C.

Thursday, 3rd June

In the forenoon the Union Wood Property of Collooney State Forest was visited. Up to 1941 this formed part of the estate of the Coopers of Markree Castle nearby. The name

evidently refers to large-scale planting dating from 1800 but the sessile oak on the rocky slopes appears to be native and subjected to the usual coppicing treatment. Collooney was one of the last centres of the iron-smelting industry with wood charcoal carried on by the Coote family who also operated in Leix.

Features of this wood on metamorphic rocks were fine specimens of Silver and Douglas fir, some of the latter reaching 136 feet in height and with a fine length of clean stem. The symmetrical crowns of these Douglas, showing no evidence of wind pressure, were admired. Methods of trapping pine weevil, which are especially troublesome in our western forests, were also studied. The party climbed to the summit of Union Rock from which vantage point a fine panoramic view of the entire district was obtained. With this fresh in their minds, the Convener explained the inter-relation of topography, geology, climate and soils of the areas seen, pointing to the exaraordinary contrast between the flat tableland with precipitous escarpments of the Upper Limestones in Belbulben and the irregular jagged outline of the hard, heavily-glaciated gneisses of the Ox Mountains.

In the afternoon the remarkable topography of the Upper Limestones was seen at close quarters in the beautiful "Swiss Valley" of Glencar, a deep narrow rift complete with lake and waterfalls. For the forester this area provided a difficult problem in road construction on steep unstable slopes. The skill shown by the forest staff in road construction and in spanning ravines with concrete bridges was admired.

Before leaving Glencar at the end of the excursion both the President and Convener paid tribute to the officials, Messrs. Ager, McCormack, Moloney, Kerrigan, Madden and Moore for the excellence of the arrangements and their unfailing help and courtesy throughout.
